

Key to Workplace Success

Soft Skills

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Whether you are trying to get your first job, attempting to advance in your career, or even looking to make a major change; so-called “soft skills” are critical to your quest. One of the major themes of the “new economy” is change! In a 40-plus-year working life, each of us will change occupations, and even careers many times. How can any of us prepare ourselves through education and training for such a seemingly unsure employment future? In a phrase: “soft skills.”

What are Soft Skills ?

Soft skills consist of a large set of somewhat nebulously defined qualities, attributes, and traits that are needed in the workplace, and that employers find critical for employee success. They are not the technical skills or expertise needed by a particular occupation.

Soft Skills are often categorized into four groups:

- Problem Solving/Critical Thinking and Reasoning
- Communication – Oral and Written
- Personal Qualities / Work Ethic
- Interpersonal / Teamwork

Problem solving and reasoning skills include important personal traits such as creativity, the ability to learn, decision-making, planning, and common sense.

Communication skills are needed to present and receive information from customers, co-workers, and supervisors.

Oral and written communication skills such as public speaking, report and letter writing, active listening, and teaching; are always in high demand and frequently lacking, according to job recruiters.

Personal qualities and work ethic skills run the gamut from appearance to effectiveness. Important personal traits include grooming/ hygiene/dress, dependability, honesty, motivation, time management, and initiative.

Finally, teamwork and interpersonal skills are those needed to succeed in the collaborative efforts required in most job settings. In this area some highly-valued skills include working well with others, leadership, a sense of humor, and the ability to resolve conflicts constructively.

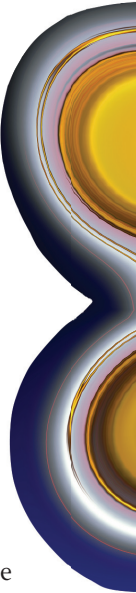
Soft skills are difficult to measure because they have many intangible qualities. Each person will have soft skills in varying combinations and degrees of proficiency. While not easily taught, with effort soft skills can be emulated, honed, and strengthened.

Employers can generally train their workers to apply technical abilities to meet the day-to-day demands of the job. But when it comes to soft skills, employers want workers who already possess the necessary traits needed to succeed.

Job Search

Often, as we prepare for the world of work, the focus is on our training and education. Technical competence is what one strives for. Yet much of career success is likely to be related to the personal attributes and interpersonal skills we have – our soft skills proficiency.

Soft skills can differentiate between technically qualified candidates for a position. Technical ability – “hard skills,” acquired by training,





Communicate Clearly
Active Listener
Follow Directions
Share Information
Present Ideas Understandably
Express Opinions
Speak Confidently
Appropriate to the Situations
Persuasive
Ability to Teach

Honest
Hard Working
Take Initiative
Motivated
Flexible
Detail Oriented
Act Professionally
Organized
Confident
Outgoing
Positive
Good Grooming
Punctual
Dependable
Productive
Loyal

Analytical
Computer Literate
Creative
Formulate Solutions
Quick Learner
Innovative
Computational Competent
Common Sense
Planner
Resourceful

Get Along with Others
Work Well with Others
Collaborate
Share Knowledge
Extend a Hand
A Leader
Tact / Polite
Sense of Humor
Serve Clients
Resolve Conflict Maturely
Sociable
Respectful
Cooperative
Accept Feedback
Manage Emotions
Take Direction


Employers Want

- Problem Solving/Critical Thinking and Reasoning
- Communication – Oral and Written
- Personal Qualities / Work Ethic
- Interpersonal / Teamwork

experience, and education; can be detailed on a resume and are generally the attributes used to screen a pool of applicants to determine those who are qualified for a job. Choosing between qualified individuals is accomplished by the interview process, testing, and by checking references, a process of evaluating a job seeker's soft skills.

Hard skills will get you an interview, but soft skills will get you the job.

Soft skills are critical to your value as an employee and your ability to progress within a company. Worker “fit”, value, and success is a function of the mix of soft skills one possesses.

In a lifetime, you could work on improving aspects of your soft skills without end. None of us is perfect. The benefits of developing and strengthening these skills are clear—not the least of which is that soft skills are transferable to any job situation, career, or occupation. 

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